conversion of free goods shipping bills to drawback shipping bills.

(iii) Scope of condonation of delay in filing Brand Rate applications further enlarged.

(iv) EDI System introduced in major Customs Houses for Speedy disposal of drawback claims.

(v) Action initiated to amend Customs Act (Sec. 75A) to provide that interest will be paid if drawback is delayed beyond two months instead of the existing period of 3 months.

So far as the Central Excise operations are concerned, the clearances of exciable goods are made at individual factories/depots and therefore there cannot be any concept of Single Window clearances. However, the Government has been simplifying the procedures in recent years and proposes to simplify further to facilitate the trade, industry and particularly the exporters. Guidelines have been issued from time to time that exporters must be given attention on priority basis. The export clearances should be attended to promptly where the exporter requests for examination and sealing at the place of despatch. For large manufacturer-exporters, provision for self-sealing and self-certification with minimum examination at the port has been introduced this year. A new Warehousing Procedure for export goods have been announced which has reduced the paper work in certain categories of exports and is expected to enhance exports from India. Instructions have also been issued to expeditiously issue the certificate of proof of exports.

(b) No separte guidelines have been issued from Customs Wing. However, instructions have been issued to expeditiously issue the certificate of proof of exports regarding Central Excise Clearances.

(c) and (d) Continuous efforts are made to train and motivate the field officers so as to make them fully conversant with the export procedures. Apart from formal training organised by Regional Training Institutes of the Department and by the National Academy of Customs, Excise and Narcotics which helps in raising technical efficiency, emphasis is laid on assessee friendly attitude of the field officers. Efforts are also being made to computerise the Central Excise operations and develop expertise among the field officers.

There has been a major restructuring in the Customs and Central Excise Department, wherein new Commissionerates and Customs Houses have been created and relocated. For this purpose certain posts of Commissioners/Commissionerates and Customs Houses have been created and relocated. For this purpose certain posts of Commissioners/Chief Commissioners/Directors General has been created. Further, the modernisation of equipment exercise have been undertaken & the Comissionerates/Divisions/Ranges have been provided with Fax Machines, Computers etc., Commissionerates have also been provided with additional vehicles to facilitate meeting the revenue targets.

Currency Chest Branch Rules of State Bank of Indore

1004. SHRI GOVINDRAM MIRI:Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred Question 672 given in the Rajya Sabha on the 2nd June, 1998 and state:

(a) what are the rules and responsibility of the currency chest branches of the Bank of Indore;

(b) what action have been taken by the Bank Management against the erring officers/staff in this regard;

(c) whether it is a fact that without sending remittance to RBI for want of space in currency chest branch of the State Bank of Indore, Janakpuri Branch, New Delhi, the cash was accepted in the next week; and

(d) if so, the reasons for misleading Government and save the guilty staff members?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BANKING, REVENUE AND INSURANCE) (SHRI KADAMBUR M. R. JANARTHANAN): (a) to (d) Information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Package for Investment in SAARC Countries

1005. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether permission of RBI is required to invest in business in the SAARC countries;

(b) if so, what are the formalities and upto what amount of investment can be made; and

(c) whether Government are considering a special package for investment in SAARC countries?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI YASHWANT SINHA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) A statement indicating the existing procedure and ceilings for Indian Direct Investment abroad including SAARC Countries is annexed. (*See* below)

(c) No, Sir.

Statement

Details indicating the existing procedure and Ceiling for Indian Direct Investment abroad including SAARC countries.

Under the existing guidelines, the following routes for Indian Direct Investment in Joint Ventures/Wholly Owned Subsidiaries abroad including SAARC Countries are provided:

A. Fast Track Routes (FTR)

(i) Under this route, the proposals upto the investment of US$ 15mn. in all countries including SAARC Countries (Rs. 60 crores in Nepal and Bhutan) are cleared by RBI subject to certain laid down criteria.

(ii) Investment upto US$ 15mn. out of the balance held in the Exchange Earners Foreign Currency (EEFC) Accounts are cleared by authorised dealers subject to the criteria laid down. Application in Form ODA is required to be made to Authorised Dealers with whom the EEFC account is maintained.

(iii) Proposals for Investment upto 50% of the GDRs as approved by Ministry of Finance, Department of Economic Affairs, under its normal GDR approval process. Applications are required to be made to Ministry of Finance (DEA).

B. Normal (Committee) Route

All other cases not falling in FTR above are considered by Special Committee chaired by Commerce Secretary within the parameters of stipulated policy and recommendation made for final approval by RBI.

C. Large Investment

For Investment over US$ 15mn., application is required to be made to RBI. The resources beyond US$ 15mn. are to be raised through EEFC/GDR issues. Specific approval of the Ministry of Finance will also be necessary for raising GDRs as per the extent EURO-issue guidelines.

D. Blanket Investment Approval to Software Companies

Foreign Investment upto 50% of cumulative actual export/foreign exchange realisation in the preceding three years subject to a maximum of US$ 25mn. in a block of three consecutive financial years [inclusive of investment upto US$ 15 mn. are allowed by authorised dealers out of EEFC Accounts under the EEFC (Fast Track Wondow)].